

ON

A REMARKABLE PHENOMENON

OBSERVED AT RANGOON

BY

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I ACCIDENTALLY heard mention by an eye-witness (a lady residing at Hong Kong) of a circumstance which struck me as so remarkable and interesting that I collected the particulars with care, allowing the narrator to tell her own story, and filling up important particulars by putting questions as little as possible calculated either to lead or mislead.

It was in the year 1846 that she was on board her husband's ship the 'Manook,' in the Rangoon River, and was walking up and down the poop in company with the chief mate and a child four years old, the poop awning being at the time spread overhead. It was about half-past 7 in the evening, and then quite dark, when suddenly, without any warning, a tremendous sheet of light appeared to rush across the bows of the vessel in a horizontal direction. The light was not like lightning, but appeared to pass swiftly along, and had the aspect of a red thick flame, occupying the whole space left visible between the awning and the ship. The suddenness and terrific nature of the glare was such that she fell down upon the deck, believing, as she expresses it, that the world had come to an end, while the child screamed aloud with terror.

As this frightful luminous appearance rushed by the ship a considerable accession of heat was felt by both the adult persons, and a strong sulphurous smell also accompanied it, though how long this feature lasted cannot now be stated with any certainty. But the phenomenon was unaccompanied by any sound, and sped noiselessly on; nor could they see where it went, or what finally became of it. The whole affair lasted but some seconds, the light having dashed past them with a speed only inferior to lightning.

The captain of the ship, and Captain Brown, postmaster and only European resident at the time, were in the house of the latter, situated but a short distance from the shore and from the

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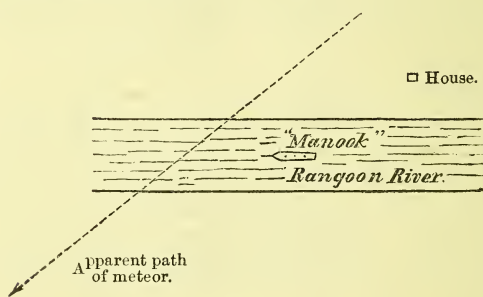
ship. They both averred that they felt a sudden and remarkable heat, although they saw no light ; and when told of the circumstance afterwards, on comparing notes as to the time, they immediately exclaimed words to this effect, " Then that explains the sudden and unaccountable warmth we felt at that time."

It is worthy of remark that my informant spontaneously stated that, as well as she could recollect from collateral circumstances, this must have occurred some time during the month of November.

The two gentlemen on shore are both dead ; but the mate is believed to be still living. It was often a matter of wonder to them that an occurrence which to them appeared so extraordinary was never publicly noticed ; but it seems that they were the only Europeans who observed it, as I learn that, besides the natives of the place, the only other residents at that time were Armenians.

The whole account which I have been able to gather of this phenomenon so closely agrees with the description given of that class of meteors known as silent fireballs, or bolides, that I feel convinced that my informant must have witnessed one of these bodies in terrific proximity ; and as I am not aware that any one has ever recorded such an experience, I have thought it worth while to draw up this *procès verbal*, to which my informant has attached her sanction.

When at Dundee I was much struck by Mr. A. Herschel's concluding experiment, which represented a silent bolide, and considerably startled the audience by its noiseless flash across the back of the hall. The gliding light and the accompanying heat forcibly recalled to my recollection the particulars I had gleaned of the Rangoon phenomenon.



The above plan will assist in giving an idea of the relative position of the ship, house, and meteor.